

Another very simple ornament occasionally used in our MSS. consists of a series of angulated lines, placed at equal distances apart, forming a series of steps. See Plate LXIV., Figs. 28 and 36; and Plate LXV., Fig. 2. This is, however, by no means characteristic of Celtic ornament, occurring elsewhere from the earliest period.

The last ornament we shall notice is, indeed, the simplest of all, consisting merely of red dots or points. These were in great use as marginal ornaments of the great initial letters, as well as of the more ornamental details, and are, indeed, one of the chief characteristics distinguishing Anglo-Saxon and Irish MSS. Sometimes, also, they were even formed into patterns, as in Plate LXIV., Figs. 34 and 37.

3. ORIGIN OF CELTIC ORNAMENT.—The various styles of ornament described above were practised throughout Great Britain and Ireland from the fourth or fifth to the tenth or eleventh centuries; and as they appear in their purest and most elaborate forms in those parts where the old Celtic races longest prevailed, we have not hesitated to give the Celtic as their generic name.

We purposely, indeed, avoid entering into the question, whether the Irish in the first instance received their letters and styles of ornament from the early British Christians, or whether it was in Ireland that the latter were originated, and thence dispersed over England. A careful examination of the local origin of the early Anglo-Saxon MSS., and of the Roman, Romano-British, and early Christian inscribed and sculptured stones of the western parts of England and Wales, would, we think, materially assist in determining this question. It is sufficient for our argument that Venerable Bede informs us, that the British and Irish Churches were identical in their peculiarities, and the like identity occurs in their monuments. It is true, indeed, that the Anglo-Saxons, as well as the Irish, employed all these styles of ornamentation. The famous Gospels of Lindisfarne, or Book of St. Cuthbert, preserved in the Cottonian Library in the British Museum, is an unquestionable proof of such employment; and it is satisfactorily known that this volume was executed by Anglo-Saxon artists at Lindisfarne at the end of the seventh century. But it is equally true that Lindisfarne was an establishment founded by the monks of Iona, who were the disciples of the Irish St. Columba, so that it is not at all surprising that their Anglo-Saxon scholars should have adopted the styles of ornamentation used by their Irish predecessors. The Saxons, pagans as they were when they arrived in England, had certainly no peculiarities of ornamental design of their own; and no such remains exist in the north of Germany as would give the least support to the idea that the ornamentation of Anglo-Saxon MSS., &c., was of a Teutonic origin.

Various have been the conjectures whence all these peculiarities of ornament were derived by the early Christians of these islands. One class of writers, anxious to overthrow the independence of the ancient British and Irish Churches, has referred them to a Roman origin, and has even gone so far as to suppose that some of the grand stand crosses of Ireland were executed in Italy. As, however, not a single Italian MS. older than the ninth century, nor a single piece of Italian stone sculpture having the slightest resemblance to those of this country, can be produced, we at once deny the assertion. An examination of the magnificent work upon the Catacombs of Rome, lately published by the French Government, in which all the inscriptions and mural drawings executed by the early Christians are elaborately represented, will fully prove that the early Christian art and ornamentation of Rome had no share in developing that of these islands. It is true that the grand tessellated pages of the MSS. above described bear a certain general resemblance to the tessellated pavement of the Romans, and had they been found only in Anglo-Saxon MSS., we might have conjectured that such pavements existing in various parts of England, and which in the seventh and eighth centuries must still have remained uncovered, were the originals from which the illuminator of the MSS. had taken his idea; but it is in the Irish MSS., and in the MSS. which are clearly traceable to Irish influence, that we find these pages

most elaborately ornamented, and we need hardly say that there are no Roman tessellated pavements in Ireland, the Romans never having visited that island.

It may, again, be said that the interlaced ribbon patterns, so common in the MSS., &c., were derived from the Roman tessellated and mosaic work; but in the latter the interlacing was of the simplest and most inartificial character, bearing no resemblance to such elaborate, interlaced knotwork as is to be seen, for instance, in Plate LXIII. In fact, in the Roman remains the ribbons are simply alternately laid over each other, whilst in the Celtic designs they are *knotted*.

Another class of writers insist upon the Scandinavian origin of these ornaments, which we are still perpetually accustomed to hear called Runic knots, and connected with Scandinavian superstitions. It is certainly true that in the Isle of Man, as well as at Lancaster and Bewcastle, we find Runic inscriptions upon crosses, ornamented with many of the peculiar ornaments above described. As, however, the Scandinavian nations were Christianised by missionaries from these islands, and as *our* crosses are quite unlike those still existing in Denmark and Norway; as, moreover, they are several centuries more recent than the oldest and finest of our MSS. there can be no grounds for asserting that the ornaments of the MSS. are Scandinavian. A comparison of our plates with those contained in the very excellent series of illustrations of the ancient Scandinavian relics in the Copenhagen Museum, lately published,\* is sufficient to disprove such an assertion. Only one figure (No. 398) in the whole of the 460 representations given in that work exhibits the patterns of our MSS., and we have no hesitation in asserting it to be a reliquary of Irish work. That the Scandinavian artists adopted Celtic ornamentation, especially such as was practised about the end of the tenth or eleventh centuries, is evident from the similarity between their carved wooden churches (illustrated in detail by M. Dahl) and Irish metal-work of the same period, such as the Cross of Cong in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin.

Not only the Scandinavian, but also the earlier and more polished artists of the school of Charlemagne and his successors, together with those of Lombardy, adopted many of the peculiar Celtic ornaments in their magnificently illuminated MSS. They, however, interspersed with them classical ornaments, introducing the acanthus and foliage, giving a gracefulness to their pages which we look for in vain in the elaborate, but often absolutely painfully intricate, work of our artists. Our Fig. 25, in Plate LXIV., is copied from the Golden Gospels in the British Museum, a magnificent production of Frankish art of the ninth century, in which we perceive such a combination of ornament. The Anglo-Saxon and Irish patterns were, however, so closely copied (always, however, of a much larger size) in some of the grand Frankish MSS. that the term Franco-Saxon has been applied to them. Such is the case with the Bible of St. Denis in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, of which forty pages are preserved in the Library of the British Museum. Plate LXIV., fig. 31, is copied from this MS. of the real size.

It remains to inquire, whether Byzantium and the East may not have afforded the ideas which the early Celtic Christian artists developed in the retirement of their monasteries into the elaborate patterns which we have been examining. The fact that this style of ornament was fully developed before the end of the seventh century, taken in connexion with that of Byzantium having been the seat of Art from the middle of the fourth century, will suggest the possibility that the British or Irish missionaries (who were constantly travelling to the Holy Land and Egypt) might have there obtained the ideas or principles of some of these ornaments. To prove this assertion will, indeed, be

\* In the division of this Danish work devoted to the Bronze age we find various examples of spiral ornaments on metal-work, but always arranged in the *Ω* manner, and with but very few inartificial combinations. In the second division of the Iron period, we also find various examples of fantastical-intertwined animals also represented on metal-work. Nowhere, however, do the interlaced ribbon patterns, or the diagonal Z-like patterns, or the trumpet-like spiral patterns, occur.